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A
SERMON

PREACHED IN
BEWDLEY CHAPEL,

BEFORE
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE LORD WESTCOTE,
HIGH STEWARD AND RECORDER,
AND
THE WORSHIPFUL THE BAILIFF AND CORPORATION,
OF BEWDLEY,

On the 27th of September,
1792.

BY
THE REV. G. BUTT, A. M.

CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO HIS MAJESTY; VICAR OF KIDDERMINSTER;
AND RECTOR OF STANFORD, IN WORCESTERSHIRE.



KIDDERMINSTER:

PRINTED BY GEORGE GOWER.



TO
THE HON. GEORGE ANNESLEY,
OF
ARLEY-HALL,
IN THE COUNTY OF STAFFORD.

DEAR SIR,

AT a very numerous and respectable meeting in the town of Bewdley, in which were present the Right Honourable the High Steward and Recorder, the Worshipful the Bailiff, and the other Magistrates and Members of the Corporation of that loyal Borough, I had, in your presence, the honour of being unanimously requested to publish the following discourse: and however unprepared I might be, in every point of view, for so unmerited a compliment, when I considered the occasion, and topics of the discourse, and the respectability of them who wished its publication, I could not but receive their request as a command which I was not at liberty to disobey. It was not within my compass of time, nor was it at all my plan, when addressing a well-principled and judicious audience, to deliver a composition, the result of political research, and to
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support opinions by elaborate argumentation, which I thought, and, as it seems, justly thought, were their own. I meant not to convey instruction to such an audience; but to unite with them in avowing and enforcing such principles as the critical exigencies of the times call upon them, and me, and every one, to avow and enforce by every possible method. To you, Sir, it is with propriety, as with pleasure, I address this discourse: a genuine friendship has long, and must ever subsist between us; for I cannot be insensible not only to the steadiness of your kindness to me, but to all your old friends, however numerous; nor can I express how much I esteem and admire your rectitude of Christian principle, and your active humanity in promoting the morals, and relieving the distress, of those who have the good fortune to be within the reach of your influence.

I have the honour to be,

Dear Sir,

Your very sincere and obliged friend,

GEORGE BUTT.

KIDDERMINSTER,
October 1st, 1792.

SERMON.

I PETER, v. 5.

Yea, all of you be subject one to another.

THE circumstances of Europe in the present instant of time, which rivet to themselves the anxious attention of every virtuous and thinking man, call us now to the widest views of principles and duties, and should awaken a solicitude not merely for the local preservation of good order in this or that particular community, but for a continuance, among mankind at large, of those august lights, establishments, institutions, and political regulations under which the civilized parts of the earth have gradually advanced in prosperity; which influence, more or less, the welfare of empires, and which cannot be destroyed but at the expence of hazarding the virtue and peace of mankind for ages to come.

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The man, the citizen, and the Christian is now brought to the most alarming test of his wisdom and virtue: and, in this crisis of human affairs, a careless security is as much to be dreaded, as the most precipitate rashness. It is to be lamented, that the knowledge of human nature and human affairs, are not always equally united in the persons who have the greatest power for the regulation of society; hence the politician, when ignorant of human nature, and the philosopher, when unseen in human affairs, would sometimes advance measures destructive of public tranquillity. It is, in my opinion, an idle mistake in him who thinks that the great contests which now agitate Europe, are merely of a political nature, however this may constitute a part, and, in some instances, a laudable part of them; they are something more, and far worse. For the chief object of one party is, I doubt not, the destruction of Christianity itself: with a malignant zeal in their cause, which if it is not opposed with as much zeal, without any malignity, or sinister ends of secular pride, avarice, or ambition, we have reason to dread lest a part of the present generation may in their calamities hold forth
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to after ages that awful, but salutary instruction, which the original crucifiers of the universal Saviour afforded in their national miseries and destruction. The children of Israel were signally gifted with divine instruction and favour; and were, in these respects, the *chosen* and *elect* of God. You are acquainted with their especial ingratitude to their Divine Benefactor, and its tremendous consequences:—the monitory pillar of salt is not yet entirely melted away; of the divine judgments on the sons of Abraham as yet some traces remain on the earth. What the Jews were, as the depositories of heavenly light respecting the rest of mankind, we Christians now are; and what our light is, and what the advantages are which we derive from it, we cannot be ignorant; nor can we be ignorant that the first Christian country, which of late years has evidenced the largest measure of infidelity, and a correspondent practice *in all orders*, is at this instant the most miserable nation on earth; and has recently exhibited in its capital—in many other parts of the realm—in its numerous exiles, now crowding into the

neighbouring countries, examples of flagitious and calamitous horrors, transcended only by the recorded actions and sufferings of Jerusalem, after the abuse of the old, and the rejection of the new, light which it had received from the bounty of heaven. These facts are respectfully submitted to your serious consideration; these facts, perpetrated by savage cruelty, in obedience to the dictates of prudential cowardice and Machiavellian policy, which would accomplish its ends by *whatever* means. Ye will determine from the means now adopted, as instrumental to the end in view, whether the actors, and the nation which has not disavowed them, can be the disciples of the benevolent Jesus. Perhaps, by way of accounting in part for those atrocious massacres which again, after the lapse of generations, have marked the Gallic metropolis, it may not be amiss to suggest, that the human mind, in a state of apostacy from Christianity, is, it is probable, in such a delirious and irritating fever of chagrin, as to be capable of cruelties unknown to the civilized Pagans. These had their faith respecting the Gods, and a future state
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of rewards and punishments; they acknowledged the difference between good and evil actions—they were not bewildered in absolute scepticism, nor had lost the sense, however imperfect it was, of what was natural, beautiful, and manly, in human conduct; they had not rushed into a shameless defiance of all opinions but what was dictated by personal reverie.

Having lately perused with attention the last, and the most perfect description of the religion of nature, which preceded the æra of Christianity (I must mean the celebrated offices of the Roman Cicero), I could not examine the recent massacres of the once polished Parisians, now glorying (witness late accounts) in their avowed infidelity, by the moral decisions of the Pagan philosopher, and not be led to think that their contempt of divine revelation had occasioned them to trample upon the law of nature; that the irritating sense of their apostacy from the one, had plunged them into an utter inattention to the other; and that human pride and selfishness, in their hurry to escape the easy yoke of Revelation, naturally rushed from that of reason, so closely entangled with it. Hence
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then, if these observations are true in your opinion, as well as mine, you will agree with me, that we have the utmost cause to dread an apostacy from Christianity, whether we consider its depredations upon the character of a man as an individual, or its ill effects upon the peace of society. And in what does the peace of society chiefly consist? is it not in the consciousness that our persons and properties are secure from the violent invasion of other men? But can we conceive that this peace will be preserved by any other means than by the power of the ruler or rulers of a nation, legally appointed with the means of protection and punishment? Dare we trust our safety with the *accidental, ever-varying* manners and sentiments of the people at large? But if not, shall we weaken the force of general law, the hands of the public magistrate, by deducting from our principles that spirit of reverence and obedience to the governing powers, which is correspondent to the magisterial office, and requisite for its efficiency, as the instrument of public security? by no means: and therefore Christianity wisely says to its ministers, *put men in mind*

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to be subject to principalities and powers—to obey magistrates; so the Apostle Paul advises Titus; and the divine wisdom thus advises man, knowing his natural pride to be such, that he will not, when qualified for freedom, be easily crushed into servitude; but that if he errs in the other extreme of irreverence to his governors, there is likely to be no end of human contest and misery. Suppose him thus habitually irreverent to government—be the experience of past ages held in contempt—let the existing rights of men be sacrificed to the imaginary—and let it be the prevailing cast of mind to despise principalities, powers, and magistrates; and what conceive ye will be the consequences? a state of warfare with the ruling powers—a lawless opposition to law—an inundation of self-created legislators—a contempt of ancient usages and moralities—a spirit of innovation, rather than improvement—and such an abolition of old constitutions, as would shake into ruin that comfortable sense of security in person and property, without which we must be miserable in this life: in short, such a state of disorder would commence, such an unsettlement of every

every thing, that all would be a lottery and a gaming-house—a scene for fraud and violence—a wild for turbulent passions, and a temptation to call into act every abominable movement in human nature. In the mean time all encouragement to virtuous exertion is precluded, by precluding the probability and security of its reward; and we are now to expect that general depravation of the human mind, which has abundantly caused the downfall of the most flourishing and renowned empires. What are now those elder schools of mankind, Egypt and India, Asia-Minor and Greece? And what is now become of that penetrative and elegant spirit, which a few ages ago distinguished the all-conquering Saracen? The city of David is become a horde of fanatics and slaves. When self-centring vanity has its full sway over the human mind, and it is relaxed by pride from every venerable restraint, the reign of selfishness is then completed, and a state of life (I will not call it a state of *society*) commences which tempts the timid into fraud, the bold into violence, and abandons both to vicious passions. In a nation thus circumstanced,

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the rational part of it want the security of quiet, which is requisite for the improvement of reason; and the irrational, that fear of legal restraint, which is the precious means of saving themselves and their fellow-citizens from the ill effects of their folly. Irreligion, the expected distemperature of the day (the twin-sister of seditious selfishness—one knows not which is born first), withdraws from human frailty those hopes and fears respecting a future state, by which only we are perfectly stimulated to ascend as high as we can in the scale of intellectual and moral excellency. In short, such is man thus left to himself—thus unrestrained, that I should have said a few months ago, it is difficult to conceive how prodigiously and monstrously wicked he can in a short time become. Man is endowed with a vast power either to degrade or exalt himself; he is a being too active and impassioned to pause between both, and therefore must not *rashly* trust himself with himself—*rashly* part with the principles that have usually restrained him from evil, or directed him to good—and *rashly* start aside from divine and human restraint, from the laws of God and the laws

of man ; he will therefore do well to assist his human frailty by cultivating a reverence for both, and by keeping down this volcano by a mountain of coercion—by that aggregation of wise precepts, moral instructions, and civil institutions which through a long series of ages have been accumulated on him either by God or man. It is the object of the latter when just and generous, to continue himself in this noble line by whatever means ; and to retain or solicit every restraint from without, which he conceives requisite for his virtuous end. Hazael started with indignant horror at the conception of a crime, which however he soon committed. Alas ! he knew not himself—he knew not man. Suppose a private family unprincipled in virtue, and each of its constituents proud and selfish ; and what are the consequences ? The parent and the master would extend their useful authority into pernicious tyranny ; and then the child and the servant imbibing the impracticable doctrine of equality, would act upon it : hatred and vengeance become the temper and practice of the household ; and the dying whispers of relinquished moralities are silenced in the
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roaring conflict of selfish passions. But this picture of an unprincipled family poorly images the depravities of an unprincipled nation: wickedness in this latitude assumes a more horrible form; countenanced by numbers it dilates into its utmost magnitude—the lingering remains of virtue are no longer cherished by a sense of shame—the last sting of reproof conscience is extracted, and the ravage of human peace, property, and life, is in proportion to the vastness of the flood which has burst its ancient mound. It were idle at this time, were it possible, to state to you the complicated miseries resulting from a general contempt of ancient laws and order, experience and authority. The labour of this discussion is lamentably prevented by recent facts that speak too clearly, and by our own recent declarations to a paternal government, in which we have pledged ourselves to God and man, to resist those disorderly courses, which are inconsistent with piety to God, and the welfare of mankind.

It is not Titus only, but every minister of God's word, who is apostolically charged to remind men of their obedience to government;

for it is an advice more or less useful at all times, since men are always apt to love power rather than obedience—to indulge in a vain conceit of their wisdom—to build their theories upon superficial information—and to interpose their activity in concerns which are above their grasp, and ought not to be subject to their control. Therefore reason as well as religion will justify any man in advising his neighbour to be subject to principalities and powers, and to obey magistrates, were it for this argument only, that his resistance in general will be either nugatory, or pernicious, or unjust; and is a waste of time, or temper, or integrity. Besides, after all, the advice only amounts to this, “keep yourselves within your place, nor
 “ assume an office to which you are probably
 “ inadequate, and understand the difference
 “ between the governor and the governed;
 “ for if being the latter, you step into the
 “ line of the former, you must (it is in
 “ general to be expected) act from inexperience, and without a requisite authority,
 “ and therefore may be pernicious, and certainly are disorderly.” This advice will in general hold good under all forms of government,

ment, and in all ages; for in general the governor or governors will possess that experience and information which are wanting to the governed, and therefore must be discouraged and embarrassed in the discharge of their office, by the fanaticism of ingenuous simplicity—by the remorseless gabble of philosophical scepticism—by the rash interference of ignorance, and the cavils of discontent. The discontented are to be especially dreaded, because they will not keep their pestilential ill humour to themselves. Millions are happy in the government and civil constitution of their country; a few thousands discontented with it, assure the millions that they are foolish and miserable; and, by every possible method, spread their plague among the once happy and the once wise: it is in vain to tell such men, that in their behaviour there is much pride, injustice, and inhumanity. Christianity, the cure of discontent, as far as it is an evil temper, equally tends to prevent the causes of it, by its precepts respecting justice and humility, benevolence and compassion; it leaves men at liberty in support of their just rights, and is as hostile to that tyranny
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which honours not all men, as to the seditious temper which honours not the king. This reverence, this obedience to government, is perfectly consistent with, is indeed expressed by, a *modest* representation of any occurring grievances, and by a *modest* suggestion of any improvements beneficial to the state: such representations, and such suggestions, we should, *in honour* to the ruling powers, suppose as acceptable to them, as they are intended to be useful and assistant; rightly understood, they are a precious tribute paid where the tribute is due—and in the multitude of such counsellors there is public safety, public glory, public prosperity; the head of the body politic is in this instance assisted by the inferior members—the light of wisdom becomes more diffusive—human affairs, ever imperfect, are advanced nigher to perfection—and the advice, which is *modestly* tendered, will be solicited by an enlarged prudence, and cherished by a princely benignity. But it matters not what that light is which is hurled like lightning at the temple of power; for it tends to shatter it, and to loosen the very foundation of civil order.

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But though human experience, though the review of human history, though in *general* the later efforts of human philosophy in union with the preceding in all ages, co-operate in supporting and enforcing the apostolical advice which we have been considering, and in securing such a degree of respect to government, as may maintain its requisite efficiency, and prevent the calamities arising from the lawless irruptions of human pride and ignorance, envy and rapacity; yet, if the authority of divine revelation is denied, it is idle to expect that deductions to be made by learned reviews of the ages past, and admonitions, however excellent, of mere men, will be sufficient to curb the licentious passions of the unlettered multitude, who are too ungentle to bend to any authority less than that of God, or too unlearned to receive any instruction by a more tedious course than that of a divine command. Infidelity, therefore, endangers every human comfort; and the governor and governed are equally unwise, if they allow not Him, who only rules in the kingdoms of men, to dictate the conduct requisite for the prosperity of these kingdoms.

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From the benevolence and omniscience of God alone, such precepts of wisdom are to be expected, as are adapted to accomplish the best ends by the best means; and all orders of men will from this source derive those instructions for their conduct which are slighted only by folly, and disobeyed only by impiety. If the governed are *divinely* commanded to obey principalities, and powers, and magistrates—the comprehensive Deity, the nursing Father of the universe, forgets not the beneficial ends of these offices, and therefore commands the governor and the governed, yea all men to be subject one to the other. If government cannot exist as such; and as such it cannot exist, if the governed are irreverent and disobedient, it is clearly the duty of the latter, for their own sake, to cherish in themselves that reverence toward the laws and the civil magistrate, which will deliver them from the miseries of discontentment and the guilt of disobedience, and leave them at liberty to *every good work*—to the cultivation of their respective callings and professional arts, and to the cheerful enjoyment of those superior pleasures

pleasures and pursuits which are incompatible with political clamour, altercation, and anxiety. Man must not be too busy in reforming the state would he find time for reforming himself. In short, Christianity would destroy the usual contest between the governor and governed, and convert the suspicious subject into the affectionate son; not into a slave, but into a son, who has but one common interest with his father. Such is the directing and healing wisdom *which is from above*, which says to *all* mankind, *be ye subject one to the other*; which admits not of a divided interest between the different orders of men, however, admitting the orders, it appoints their different and respective duties; for if it exacts a salutary reverence, and a just obedience from the governed to the governor, yet it still reminds principalities, powers, and magistrates (when it reminds *all* men to *be subject one to the other*) to elevate themselves higher by their personal virtue, and the opportunity of their exalted station, than men can elevate them by the station itself: yes, it virtually commands them to exalt themselves into the first forms

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of beneficence, justice, and magnanimity ; that by the lustre of their *conspicuous* examples, and by the energies of their heroic fortitude, they may spread the prosperity of mankind, and firmly restrain, or fearlessly crush, the enemies of public tranquillity. In short, I would say, by way of concluding this discourse, and concentrating its whole import upon your minds, that the divine policy, intimated in the apostolical precept, which has been the subject of our attention, includes a practice of reciprocal benevolence between the governors and the governed, which, perfectly transcribed into their conduct, would at length testify by its fruit, the wisdom of man in being governed by God ; and that the best guide which he can follow, for the acquisition of his *temporal* prosperity, is that Saviour of all mankind, who is the only means of his *eternal*.

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